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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 SUVA 000586

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TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PREL](#) [CASC](#) [MARR](#) [FJ](#)  
SUBJECT: FIJI POLICE IN THE LINE OF FIRE

REF: SUVA 581 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: DCM Ted Mann, per 1.4 (B) and (D)

#### Summary

¶1. (C) The Fiji Police Force stood in the forefront of opposition to the plans of RFMF Commander Frank Bainimarama to overthrow the lawfully elected government of Fiji. Now that the coup has taken place, remaining senior officers are forced to work with the new military government and the commissioner it appointed. The police face the challenge of fighting a rising crime rate with reduced capacity, while trying to avoid becoming a political tool of the military. Early indications are that crime has not risen noticeably in post-coup Fiji and that the police have been successful in maintaining an appearance of independence. However, a slowing economy, the military's decision to disarm the police, and the possibility that more pre-coup senior officers will be let go could make a bad situation worse.

#### The New Order

¶2. (C) The Fiji police have been led for the last three years by Commissioner Andrew Hughes. Hughes is an active duty senior Australian Federal Policeman who was seconded to Fiji in 2003 to serve a five-year contract. Hughes has worked hard and successfully to reform and modernize the police. With the backing of his senior officers, Hughes attempted to bring criminal charges against the military's senior officers in the lead-up to the coup. Due to threats by the military against he and his family, Hughes left Fiji a week before the coup. His Deputy, Moses Driver, and Assistant Commissioner for Crime Kevueli Bulamainaivalu were sacked immediately after the coup. Driver had been very vocal in his opposition to military actions and called the military's post-coup claims that the police and military were working together "lies." Bulamainaivalu led the police investigation of sedition charges against the military's senior officers.

¶3. (C) On December 6, Bainimarama appointed a retired director of the Criminal Investigative Division, Jimmy Koroi, to be the new Police Commissioner. Sada Nand, the currently serving Assistant Commissioner for Crime, was moved up to be the Deputy Commissioner of Police. Josia Rasiga, the current Director of Operations for the Criminal Investigative Division, was moved up to be the Assistant Commissioner for Crime. Bainimarama appointed Bernard Daveta, former head of the Special Branch Division, to a previously defunct position entitled "Chief of Staff." This position fits between the four Assistant Commissioners and the Deputy Commissioner position. All other senior officers kept their current

positions.

#### Leadership in Transition

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¶4. (C) Assistant Commissioner for Operations Samuela Matakibau told RSO that Koroi has been out of the force for over twenty years and does not understand the reforms and force structures put in place by Hughes. Matakibau fears the reforming spirit Hughes instilled in his officers may be lost under Koroi. Koroi does not appear to be confident in his abilities and tends to put off making substantive decisions, said Matakibau. Perhaps reflecting the fact that Koroi is not up to the task, the military has named a replacement Commissioner, Romanu Tikotokoca. Tikotokoca has not yet formally accepted the job. According to Matakibau, Tikotokoca has been in touch with Hughes and Driver in Australia. Both advised him to wait until the Great Council of Chiefs named (or reaffirmed) the new president before accepting the Commissioner's job, thereby avoiding the stigma of having been appointed by the Commander. The police rank and file appreciate the fact that Hughes and Driver seem to support Tikotokoca's appointment, said Matakibau.

¶5. (C) Matakibau told RSO that a number of senior officers are still in contact with Hughes and Driver in Australia. Matakibau says that Driver advised him to stay in his current position and not to accept any promotions or to appear to benefit from the leadership shakeup. This could also help Matakibau avoid possible visa sanctions from New Zealand, Australia and the United States, Driver said. The Director of Uniformed Operations is reportedly also in communication with Driver and was able to confirm to the press that Driver had been offered a job with the Australian Federal Police (he

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later denied the report).

#### Military "Roughing Up" Dissidents

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¶6. (C) Since the appointment of the new Commissioner, the police have resisted any notion that they are a tool of the military. According to RSO police contacts, the military has not interfered with the police's ability to act against common crime. The problems have been when members of the military commit crimes. Since the coup, several people who opposed the military takeover have been taken against their will to the military barracks for a "meeting" with senior officers. These meetings can end with a simple verbal warning or at the other extreme a threat with a pistol to the head.

¶7. (C) Matakibau told RSO that in the Western District of Fiji, there have been several incident of soldiers picking up people who speak out against the coup and roughing them up in cane fields. Apparently two people have been checked into hospitals after these assaults. While the general public understands that there is nothing the police can do about the situation, he said, it is galling to the police to not be able to stop these assaults.

#### Police Officers Intimidated Too

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¶8. (C) Even currently serving senior police officers are not immune from the military pickups. On Saturday night December 16, 2006, Matakibau was asleep in his home when his son woke him to tell him that armed military officers were outside his house. They put him in the back of a military truck and took him to the military's strategic headquarters. At strategic headquarters, two senior military officers accused Matakibau of not cooperating with the military government and of reducing street patrols. Matakibau responded that district commanders are in charge of staffing levels and that he only stepped in if he noticed gaps in coverage. Matakibau said he told the officers that the public would soon become tired of the military's abuses of power. They need to stop the illegal detentions or the people would turn against them.

According to Matakibau, later that evening one of the officers called to apologize for the detention.

#### No Post-Coup Crime Rest Yet

¶9. (SBU) In recent years, Fiji has experienced a major rise in crime. Suva was already rated a high crime post before 2005 when overall crime in Fiji rose 15% over the 2004 level.

From January to June 2006 crime rose an additional 3% over the same period in 2005. Home invasion-type burglaries are becoming common with criminal groups ranging from two to ten breaking through grills and solid core doors. Even before the military takeover the police had severe manpower and transportation shortages. The criminal element in Fiji knows that the police are unable to respond in a timely manner to crimes. Criminals know that the small police posts in the residential areas usually have only one officer. Home-invasion burglaries have occurred within a hundred yards of small police posts.

¶10. (C) Since the coup took place, there has been a general perception in the public that crime has decreased. Military checkpoints may have impeded the movement of criminals somewhat, and there have been fewer people out in the streets at night, especially in groups. This drop in crime, however, is likely to be a short-lived phenomenon. The biggest contributor to crime in the medium- to long-term will be the inevitable slow down of the economy caused by the military takeover. Due to the coup-related tourism slowdown, hotels and tour operators have been forced to cut staff and reduce costs. Foreign sanctions imposed on Fiji because of the coup will also have an effect.

¶11. (C) To counter the rise in crime over the past two years, the police had been on a major hiring drive. With the economy likely to shrink, it will be difficult to keep the hiring at the level the police need to meet the criminal threat. Transportation has always been a major problem for the force. Last year Australia donated 23 police cars to Fiji. It is doubtful that the police will receive any new donated vehicles while the military government is in power. The police will also be cut off from training opportunities with developed countries and the ability to work with regional police organizations. The Pacific Island Chiefs of Police (PICP) has already suspended Fiji from taking part in

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any of its activities. This is the first time the PICP has suspended a country in the 35 years of the organization.

¶12. (SBU) One of the biggest blows to the effectiveness of the police was the disarming of the Police Tactical Response Unit (PTR). The unit was formed by Hughes as an elite unit that could respond to violent criminal incidents. The day before the coup, the military went to the PTR barracks and confiscated the unit's weapons. The police are now completely unarmed and have lost much of their already limited ability to deter crime.

#### Comment

¶13. (C) Due to the military take-over the police are in a tough position. They feel a strong duty to the people of Fiji to carry on with their law enforcement mission, but they are under a military leadership that routinely breaks the laws the police are charged with enforcing. There is every indication that the police will continue to attempt to keep as independent as possible from their military-appointed leadership. This may work as long as the pre-coup senior officers stay in the majority of the leadership positions. If the military were to purge those officers, then the police would be seen as merely an extension of the military.

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